

FISH and WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: November 13, 2014

Agenda Item: Addition to Big Lake WMA

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Final Approval

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 10 Minutes

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Background: The proposed acquisition is a continuation of the Big Lake WMA Eastside Addition project approved by previous Commission action during the October 11, 2012 meeting. In November 2012, FWP acquired approximately 1,110 acres of land adjacent to the east side of Big Lake WMA in Stillwater County through fee title (Figure 1, parcels 1a and 1b). This brought the total area of the WMA to ~3,170 acres. In July 2013, approximately 4 acres in parcel 3, the old railroad right-of-way, was also acquired. Funding for these purchases came from the Migratory Bird Wetland Habitat Program. In addition, a road easement providing public vehicular access to the NE corner of the WMA was acquired from two landowners in February 2014, funded by the Access Public Lands program. The purchase of parcel 2 (Figure 1), of approximately 160 acres for \$24,000, is nearing completion, and is being brought to the F&W Commission for final approval. This project would also be funded through the Migratory Bird Wetland Program.

Public Involvement Process & Results: An Environmental Assessment (EA) on the entire project was prepared and released on August 6, 2012, with the public comment period running through August 31, 2012. A public meeting was held in Billings on Aug. 16, 2012. Of the three written comments received, two supported the Proposed Action. One comment from the State Historic Preservation Board reminded FWP to consider any cultural/historic features that may be on the property. At the public meeting, four people offered comments, all of which were in favor of the Proposed Action. A Decision Notice accepting the Proposed Action was issued on September 21, 2012.

Alternatives and Analysis:

Proposed Action: Purchase in fee-title approximately 160 acres of private land in parcel 2 within Big Lake WMA. This acquisition will complete the Big Lake WMA Eastside Addition project.

Alternative A-No Action: The 160 acres of private land in parcel 2 will not be acquired. A private in-holding within Big Lake WMA will complicate management and public access on the WMA.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale: The Department recommends approval by the F&W Commission to purchase parcel 2 within Big Lake WMA. This purchase will improve management and public access on the WMA resulting in enhanced public hunting and wildlife viewing opportunities in perpetuity.

Proposed Motion: I move that the Commission approve the Department's recommendation to purchase in fee-title the approximately 160 acres of private land within the boundary of Big Lake WMA.